

S. Viet Nam -> Pres. Harkins (Paul) (Rev.)

Approved For Release 2000/08/27 : CIA-RDP75-00149R000300440005-9

NEW YORK  
DAILY NEWS

CPYRGHT

CIA 5-03.2  
Gout 1-06 Mo

for 2-01 US/S. Viet Nam  
for 2-01 S. Viet Nam / US

# CAPITOL STUFF

By TED LEWIS

Washington, Jan. 29—(Inasmuch as Defense Secretary McNamara has told Congress that the military situation in South Viet Nam is loused up, there is a question: What is going to be done about it?)

After all, we have 14,000 troops of various kinds in the Red-infiltrated country. If the war effort deteriorated after the overthrow of the Diem government in November and there is only what McNamara calls "hope" of improvement, then where do we go from here?

It is generally agreed in Congress that the time is ripe for President Johnson to clarify his Viet Nam policy. In the process he is going to have to straighten out a mess right here in Washington which for too long has crippled and befuddled our military assistance program as it pertains to South Viet Nam.

McNamara's Congressional testimony that the war is going far from good only points up the need of a Presidential decision.

The Defense Secretary is now being criticized — unfairly in the opinion of his supporters — for giving an honest account of the Viet Nam military situation without proposing what should be done to straighten out the mess.

However, it isn't up to McNamara to spell out in public testimony what this government's policy should be. That is up to Johnson. All McNamara and the Pentagon can do is to inform Congress that the U.S. military is operating as efficiently as possible in Viet Nam under circumstances largely beyond its control.

Why should McNamara, for example, be the whipping boy because this government announced only a few months ago that the war was going so well that by 1965 we would be able to withdraw most of our military personnel?

That was a White House statement issued by John F. Kennedy. Our military did not instigate it, but it felt required to support the stand of the Commander in Chief.

## Second-String Striped Pants Boys Goofed

Why should McNamara and our military also be booted around for the "accelerated rate" of Viet Cong activities after the November overthrow of the decrepit Diem government?

Neither the Pentagon nor Gen. Paul Harkins, commander of our Viet Nam assistance forces, was responsible for the coup d'etat. Our military didn't like Diem either, but they opposed any revolt against his regime until there was a junta capable of taking over efficiently.

The mess the war effort is now in is largely due to second-level Asiatic "experts" in the State Department, who sold President Kennedy on the idea that Diem must go even though there was no strong leader in sight to succeed him.

Not even the often properly criticized Central Intelligence Agency wanted any part of that blunder. And blunder it turned out to be, as anyone can tell by reading between the lines of McNamara's cautious testimony.



Gen. Paul Harkins  
Overthrow wasn't his blunder

CPYRGHT

Both the CIA agents on the scene and military intelligence colleagues agreed that while Diem was pretty bad, it would be worse to have an unstable succession lacking popular support.

Yet such State Department figures as W. Averell Harriman and Roger Hillsman, assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs, helped sell JFK on the idea that "Diem must go. Now see what has happened, as McNamara said, in effect, the other day.

## A Tug-of-War Among U.S. Agencies

What is obviously required from President Johnson is to restore order out of this chaos of contradictory U. S. teams operating in the Viet Nam show. One agency should be in charge. Up to now the military has been contesting with the CIA, and both are vying with our State Department over matters of authority.

Is our Viet Nam operation primarily military, intelligence or diplomatic? Right now it is a little bit of all three, which is a helluva way to run an operation in which the lives of uniformed Americans are at stake.

And while the President figures out what to do now that McNamara has obliquely brought up the issue, he might consider whether it is smart to have as U.S. ambassador in Saigon a man suddenly restive and nostalgic because of the political climate back home.

Ambassador Henry Cadot Lodge was certainly chosen by Kennedy for the job last summer because, in part at least, it looked like good politics to have a name Republican on the Saigon scene. If South Viet Nam blew up, it would be difficult for the GOP to ride the issue hard if Nixon's 1960 running mate was in the action in a responsible role.

## Situation Poses a Worrisome Problem

But is it equally smart politics for Johnson to have Lodge as his ambassador? When JFK named Lodge last summer, the latter's days in elective politics appeared definitely over. Now Lodge clearly has the Presidential bug.

There could well be worried White House imaginings over this. Like Lodge quitting as ambassador early this spring and returning to charge that the Pentagon and the CIA had, under Johnson auspices, prevented him from cleaning up the Viet Nam mess.

Johnson must know by now that the military and Lodge don't get along. He also must know that there are suspicions that the planted reports that Gen. Harkins is to be replaced leak out of the embassy itself.

There is a crying need for a Presidential straightening-out of U.S. policy in Viet Nam on another count. There are more and more disturbing rumors that the Administration is leaning toward a neutral status for Viet Nam. This has been Charles de Gaulle's idea; it has some support here primarily because of the lack of any marked success so far in our military aid program.

The President should at least clear up the uncertainty over this aspect.